

Waking Up A

Legend

Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* gets a new lease on life.

The original Disneyland theme park opened in California on July 17, 1955, to a series of mishaps that might have sent less resilient operators straight to the commercial graveyard. Plumbing problems forced staff to turn off drinking fountains so that toilets would operate – temperatures in the mid 30s caused women's high heels to sink into melting asphalt, and scalpers sold so many counterfeit tickets that the park was miserably overcrowded.



So bad was the mood on the day, that the park's opening is referred to by Disney insider folklore as 'Black Friday'. But while live TV audiences saw future US president Ronald Reagan add to the drama by bumbling his way through his duties as the day's compare, the opening did have at least one success. Amidst the drama, Disney's iconic "Sleeping Beauty" castle was unveiled to widespread praise, even though critics uniformly dismissed the opening as a disaster. The success of Disney's castle proved a portent of things to come for the eponymous film released two years later.

Sleeping Beauty, the animated classic feature, film celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. Disney has released a two-disc platinum edition DVD set with bonus book to commemorate the occasion. The enormous appeal of the title that has resonated so comprehensively with generations of children, regardless of race or colour, is probably best summed up by the place its star Mary Costa (Princess Aurora) holds in history.

In 1960 JFK and Jackie Kennedy saw Costa sing "The Star Spangled Banner" at the Academy Awards (*Sleeping Beauty* was nominated for Best Musical Score the same year). After Kennedy was shot dead in Texas three years later in, Costa was invited by the first lady to sing at his memorial.

"Evidently they didn't forget me because Mrs.

Kennedy asked me if I would sing at his memorial," says Costa. "Of all of my performances, that's the one that stands out the most – you couldn't hear a sound, you couldn't hear people breath in the arena, we were all so stunned."

To this day Costa remains almost frozen in time, forever defined by her role in *Sleeping Beauty*. Children identify with her through the film. "I still go into classrooms, and the kids know me as the singing lady from *Sleeping Beauty*. I explain to them what the opera is all about – when we speak, we sing instead of just talking." It's something that she says she is both comfortable with, and proud of.

Costa's career aside, a quick look at the impact *Sleeping Beauty* (adapted from the fairy tale of the same name by The Brothers Grimm) has had on popular culture reveals a fascination, bordering on mania. Probability theorists named a paradox of logic 'The Sleeping Beauty Problem' after the tale. Its appeal has also managed to unite the attention spans of the Baby Boomers with Generation X, Y and Z's – no small feat given their obvious divisions in taste. This is, according to Costa, just as Walt Disney had intended.

"It took six years and 6 million dollars (to make the film)," Costa says. "In the middle of all of it he opened Disneyland. But when it was finally released, he was very, very satisfied."

